

Subject:

National Capital Planning Commission meeting of March 3, 2022

Agenda No. 6C

File No. 7745

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 147
23rd Street, NW, Washington, DC – National Desert Storm and Desert
Shield Memorial

**Re. Need for Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) in landscape
plan**

The Preliminary Plan Submission dated March 3, 2022, contains on page
9 in the section entitled “Memorial Design: Proposed Program:
Landscape Approach”:

*“The plantings within the core commemorative area would be selected
for their foliage, form, and texture, rather than flowering color. These
plantings would be native or adaptive to the area, with an emphasis on
species that are drought tolerant and require little maintenance.”*

Monarch butterfly populations are declining throughout the United
States. To help reverse this decline, President Barack Obama issued on
June 20, 2014, a presidential memorandum entitled "*Creating a Federal
Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators*".

The memorandum established a Pollinator Health Task Force, to be co-
chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture and the Administrator of the
Environmental Protection Agency. The memorandum further stated:
*"The number of migrating Monarch butterflies sank to the lowest
recorded population level in 2013–14, and there is an imminent risk of
failed migration".*

In May 2015, the Pollinator Health Task Force issued a "*National
Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators*".
The strategy laid out federal actions to achieve three goals, two of which
were:

- *Monarch Butterflies: Increase the Eastern population of the monarch butterfly to 225 million butterflies occupying an area of approximately 15 acres (6 hectares) in the overwintering grounds in Mexico, through domestic/international actions and public-private partnerships, by 2020.*
- *Pollinator Habitat Acreage: Restore or enhance 7 million acres of land for pollinators over the next 5 years through Federal actions and public/private partnerships.*

Monarch butterfly caterpillars feed only on milkweed. **To help restore monarch butterfly populations and to comply with President Obama's memorandum, the National Park Service needs to include appropriate species of milkweed in every landscape plan that will contain plantings of groundcovers and perennials.**

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) is the only milkweed species that thrives in natural areas in the Washington, DC, area and that monarch butterfly females prefer when laying eggs (see [2018 publication by V.M. Pocius, et al.](#)). The species grows in sandy, clayey, or rocky calcareous soils. It occurs along the banks or flood plains of lakes, ponds, and waterways, in prairies, forest margins, roadsides, and waste places and is ideal in semi-dry places (see the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Plant Guide for *Asclepias syriaca* at https://plants.sc.egov.usda.gov/DocumentLibrary/plantguide/pdf/pg_assy.pdf). The Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History's pollinator garden in Washington, DC, contains much *Asclepias syriaca*.

Asclepias syriaca is native to the Washington, DC, area, is drought tolerant and requires little maintenance. The species therefore fulfills the criteria set forth in the landscape approach for the core commemorative area on page 9 of the preliminary plan submission for the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial. Plantings of this milkweed species will also help restore habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators, which President Obama's 2014 memorandum and related federal documents encourage.

Recommendation:

- Plant Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) within the core commemorative area and in other appropriate areas within the National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial.